

Fifty Animals That Changed the Course of History

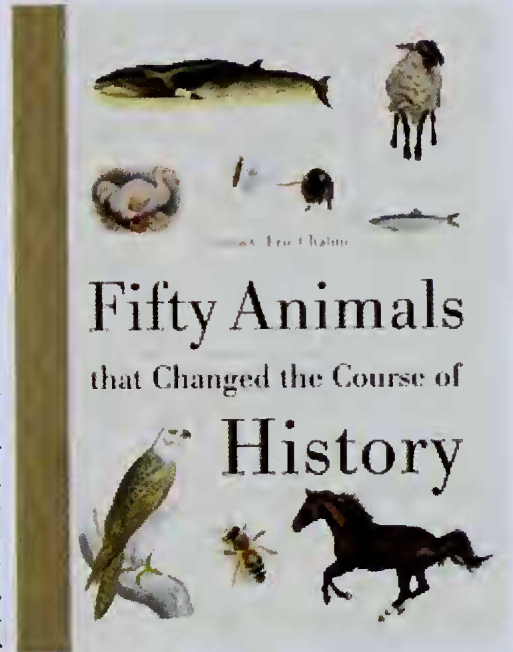
by Eric Chaline

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Eric Chaline has selected 50 animal species that have changed the course of human history. Which animal, do you think, he rates as having the 'greatest influence on the course of human history' through being '... the most important edible, practical and commercial species featured'? Which species has come close to wiping out the human species through causing three major pandemics?

The author has presented a delightful book for naturalists; in it, he documents a range of animals that have influenced our history, through their contribution as food, medicines (and disease), commercial or practical value. Some are obvious choices: the honeybee, sheep, goats, camels, horses, silkworms and chickens for their food and usefulness. Pests include rabbits, fruit fly and rats. But also, he has included Darwin's finches and *Iguanodon* for their contributions to our understanding of evolution, Spanish Fly for its use as an aphrodisiac and poison, the Bald Eagle for its symbolic emblem of nationhood (for both Rome and the USA) and the Cobra for its role in myths and legends.

This is a delightfully written book that is easy to read and has loads of useful anecdotes. The answers to my quiz questions? The Cow for the most important edible, practical and commercial species features and the Oriental Rat Flea – vector of the plague pathogen *Yersinia pestis* –



which had an essential role in the 'Black Death' and 'Great Plague'!

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